

What Has Meaning Got to do With Anything?

Why do we do it? I mean our work. In 1942 [Viktor Frankle](#) stood naked and completely alone in the world in a concentration camp. His captors planned to execute him – he was sure of it. They had taken everything he had in the world away. All those he loved and cared for had either been already murdered or would meet that fate soon. Those around him were in various states of psychological collapse and were resigned to their fate.

And yet amongst all this horror – Frankle discovered something else – an earth shaking idea as potentially transformative as the discovery of fire. He realized that the only thing we really have control over in our life.... is the meaning we create from it. Frankle describes the search for meaning as our ultimate quest.

In this video the quality of the footage may not be the greatest but the quality of the ideas are world class. He shares a startling statistic that 78% of American youth state that their top priority was ‘finding a meaning and purpose in their lives’.

The core of Frankle’s message is that we create the meaning – whether we choose consciously or whether we adopt meanings that are handed down to us from others. We are the meaning makers – whether we wish to accept the responsibility or not. In other words nothing has any meaning until we create it and our children are crying out for meaning. We must help them find one and a meaning that enables them to aspire toward the highest potential of humanity.

What Does it All Mean?

It's Friday morning here close to the Canadian Rockies. From my office I can see people rushing to get to work on time. At this time of the morning, as I watch people from my community begin their commute to work, I often wonder how many of them stop to think why they are doing it. Why we do anything is a big question. Because it is like a loose strand of wool sticking out from a sweater. By pulling it we just don't know how many things will unravel. Why also brings us to the meaning of our work. Or what we have chosen it to mean.

The more one forgets himself-by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love-the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence.

[Viktor Frankl](#) – Man's Search for Meaning

After a long, hard week self-actualization may be the last thing on our minds. Yet if our work is not part the meaning we bring to life then we are branding the time spent at it as 'meaningless'. That would be a shame. I'm talking about bringing [meaningful participation](#) into our professional work. When everyone in a team has a strong sense of [meaningful participation](#) then usually pretty amazing things are possible. The first step toward that lofty goal is, of course, finding it for ourselves.

The Impossible Will Take a Little Longer

Taken from : [THE IMPOSSIBLE WILL TAKE A LITTLE WHILE LONGER](#)
[Paul Rogat Loeb](#)

You Have to Pick Your Team

'Every day presents infinite reasons to believe that change can't happen, infinite reasons to give up. But I always tell myself, "Sonya, you have to pick your team." It seems to me that there are two teams in this world. And that you can find evidence to support the arguments of both. The trademark of one team is cynicism. They'll tell you why what you're doing doesn't matter, why nothing is going to change, why no matter how hard you work, you're going to fail. They seem to get satisfaction out of explaining how we'll always have injustice. You can't change human nature, they say. It's foolish to try. From their experience, they might be right.

Then there's another group of people who admit that they don't know how things will turn out, but have decided to work for change. I see Martin Luther King on that team, Alice Walker, Howard Zinn. I see my chaplain from college and my activist friends. They're always telling stories of faith being rewarded, of ways things could be different, of how their own lives have changed. They'll give you reasons why you shouldn't give up, testimonials why we've yet to see our full potential as a species. They believe we're partners in God's creation, and that change is really possible.

There are times when both teams seem right. Both have evidence. We'll never know who's really going to prevail. So I just have to decide which team seems happier, which side I'd rather be on. And for me that means choosing the side of faith. Because on the side of cynicism. Even if they're right,

who wants to win that argument anyway. If I'm going to stick with somebody, I'd rather stick with people who have a sense of possibility and hope. I just know that's the side I want to be on.'

This excerpt reminds me of what meaningful participation is all about. And when times are tough and the news is depressing I remind myself what team I'm on. I hope the above words give you as much solice as they gave me. **Hope is a verb not a noun.**

What Does Your Work Mean to You?

When you attach a great deal of meaning to something, like the outcome of a football game or your child's first word, you get excited and absorbed in the event. The same is true of your work. When you have a strong [sense of meaning](#) attached to what you are doing, you bring more of our attention and energy to it. Sadly, many people have been so disillusioned by their experience of work, beyond a paycheck, they have allowed it to be stripped of all meaning.

Have you ever wondered what makes volunteer work so rewarding? For one thing as a volunteer you have **chosen** to discover rewards beyond monetary gain. Something special goes on – meaning is made. You feel as if you have made a difference and attach meaning to that contribution.

So What Are You Choosing Your Work to Mean? This question assumes that you can choose it's meaning. One of the things that we so frequently forget is that we do have choice. It is easy to become distracted by the number of things in which we have no choice. There is an old story about a man who came

upon [three stonemasons](#) – each carving a piece of stone. When asked what he was doing, the first man replied he was “earning enough money to feed his children”. The second said he was, “applying his art to the best of his ability”. The third said he was, “building a cathedral”. All of the men had the same job – the meaning they applied was quite different.

[‘Gen Y’](#) is creating an impact on the way we organize ourselves at work. One of the defining characteristics of this very large cohort (second only to Baby Boomers) is their concern that the company they work for has values that match their own. Also they need to understand how their work contributes to the organization’s bottom line. In short, Gen Y needs to know they can make a difference.

The challenges associated with the imminent retirement of the [Baby Boomers](#) have been referred to a lot in the press and media. Not so much has been said about the significance of Gen Y and what they are looking for in a job. [Meaningful participation](#) is important to this demographic cohort and as such will play an increasingly important role in attracting and retaining employees for the foreseeable future. For them the question ‘What does your work mean?’ matters a great deal.

Transforming Our Participation & Collaboration

Participation – people taking part. Of course it is so much easier to get people to take part when they know their effort is meaningful. This is one of the reasons that meaningful participation is so important to our sense of well-being. Just like wholesome food is good for your body – wholesome (serving

the 'whole') activity is good for us psychologically. One of the reasons volunteer work is rated as so satisfying by participants, is that it is done for the purpose of making a contribution.

One of the best ways to achieve meaningful participation (and build collaborative intelligence) is through [communities of practice](#). [Cultivating Communities of Practice](#) (Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermot, & William S. Synder) the authors state:

'...the explosion in science and technology creates difficult paradox. At the same time that the increasing complexity of knowledge requires greater specialization and collaboration, the half-life of knowledge is getting shorter. Without communities focused on critical areas, it is difficult to keep up with the rapid pace of change.'

The challenge they refer to partially explains the proliferation of blogs – where very sepecialized information can be found that is also smack up to date. When I think of it blogging is also a great way to achieve meaningful participation with others.

Meaningful Participation...more thoughts

Why is meaningful participation so important? For one thing it connects the 'small picture', where we participate in our work, with the 'big picture' that provides context and meaning to what we are doing. People are more likely to work on the harvest of a crop that sow. We all know intuitively that when our work has personal meaning we give our energy and time more fully. This is true for just about everyone else. Our work is

providing us signifcance and relevance. It is emptying to think that material possessions can provide significance and relevance, common sense and experience constantly reminds us otherwise. [Dave Smith](#) has written a wonderful book about this topic entitled '***to be of use: The Seven Seeds of Meaningful Work***' – definately worth a look. It made me rethink my approach to my own work it might do that for you too.